



This Old Column

Indianapolis Historic Preservation Commission

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The Difference Between Districts

People often contact IHPC and ask the following question: “*My property is located in a historic district. What does that mean?*” While most people expect a simple and straightforward response, the answer is usually more complex than they had anticipated. The answer depends on what type of historic district the property is located in. However, the different types of historic districts are commonly misunderstood and unknown. It is important for property owners to understand the different types of historic districts, and to be knowledgeable about architectural design and land-use review processes in those areas, and the benefits associated with historic designation.

There are three types of official historic districts in Indianapolis: National Register districts, local historic districts, and local conservation districts.

A National Register historic district is a collection of historic buildings, sites, and structures that are significant in American history, architecture, archeology, engineering, or culture and deemed worthy of preservation. Such districts are designated by the federal government and listed in the National Register of Historic Places, which is the nation's official list of significant cultural resources. Properties listed in the National Register of Historic Places are awarded official historic status, eligible for certain tax benefits, and given consideration for federally funded projects.

Many people are surprised to learn that listing a property or district in the National Register does not protect it from inappropriate alterations, insensitive land-use or even demolition, unless federal money is being used. Local governments, operating with a historic preservation commission, administer real protection for historic resources because most land-use and design review decisions are authorized by local laws. In Marion County, the Indiana State Legislature passed State Statute IC 36-7-11.1 in 1967, which established and empowered the IHPC to preserve the character and fabric of historically significant areas and structures for all present and future citizens.

The IHPC designates two kinds of local historic areas: historic districts and conservation districts. Both local historic and conservation districts are designated areas under the

jurisdiction of IHPC and subject to design and land-use review. Local historic districts are usually eligible or already listed in the National Register of Historic Places, due to their high degree of architectural integrity. All ten of Indianapolis' local historic districts are listed in the National Register, allowing property owners to benefit from both local and national designation.

Conservation districts are areas that may have experienced significant change over time or might be ineligible for the National Register, but still represent a key component of local history. The purpose of a conservation district is to preserve and protect the historic character of the neighborhood. Ransom Place, Fayette Street, and New Augusta, were designated to provide stability and ensure neighborhood coherence. In conservation districts, fewer things are subject to design review, and the design guidelines are less restrictive than in local historic districts.

If you are interested in learning more about Indianapolis' historic districts, please contact IHPC at 327-4406 or visit our website at <http://www.indygov.org/histpres> (see "Districts and Properties"). For additional information regarding National Register historic districts, check out <http://www.nationalregisterofhistoricplaces.com>.